

States and that any presence here was under surveillance. That was not implausible at the time. With the exception of the World Trade Center bombings in 1993, not attributed before 9/11 to Bin Ladin, plots by foreign terrorists within the United States have been detected and stopped. But revelations since September 11 have made it clear that the Bureau underestimated the domestic threat. The stream of threat information we received continuously from the FBI and CIA pointed overwhelmingly to attacks on U.S. interests abroad. Certainly, the potential for attacks in the United States was there.

Former National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft told the Joint Inquiry hearing on September 19, 2002, that:

. . . I was thinking back [on] intelligence information from the FBI, and I was trying to think of cases where we actually got it. Not very much, because we are or I was focused on foreign intelligence primarily. There was some counterintelligence issues where the FBI intelligence was particularly involved, and the one case I mentioned. Pan Am 103, but that was investigative intelligence and the FBI and the CIA did an absolutely brilliant job on that. But I can't think of many--can't recall of any instances of pure intelligence product from the FBI. And I don't say that pejoratively at all.

Former National Coordinator for Counterterrorism Richard Clarke voiced similar concerns about the extent of the FBI's understanding of the domestic threat:

Let me give you the FBI case, because I think it is the most clear. Following the Millennium alert . . . and . . . review, it became very clear to . . . the [FBI] Assistant Director for Counterterrorism, there was the potential for sleeper cells in the United States, people . . . the United States that had been involved in the planned attacks.

. . . .

This was in 2000. The Assistant Director . . . then began a program to try to get more control of the 56 FBI field offices, and I visited five or six of the field offices and asked them what they were doing about al-Qa'ida. I got sort of blank looks of "what is al-Qa'ida?"

He compared the effort to add priority to al-Qa'ida investigations in the FBI field offices to "trying to . . . sort of turn this big Queen Mary luxury liner, trying to turn it."

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Numerous individuals told this Inquiry that the FBI's 56 field offices enjoy a great deal of latitude in managing their work, consistent with the dynamic and reactive nature of its traditional law enforcement mission. In counterterrorism efforts, however, that flexibility apparently served to dilute the FBI's national focus on Bin Ladin and al-